

# Public Administration Reform

## The Case of the Republic of Kazakhstan

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*The Republic of Kazakhstan is one of the countries of Central Asia which is actively working to improve the apparatus of public administration. The formation of the Republic of Kazakhstan as a sovereign state, the ongoing socio-economic reforms in the country and market relations have necessitated a transition to a new administrative mechanism. The meaning of the new mechanism means eradicating bureaucracy and corruption, increasing the level of people's trust in the state bodies and provision of quality public services.*

*The Republic of Kazakhstan has made considerable progress in reforming its public administration. The country continues to modernise this process. The primary purpose of the present paper is to review one of the public administration reforms in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Specifically, the article aims to present a reform such as creating the Population Service Centre (PSC) and the e-government project to provide public services to the citizens in the Republic of Kazakhstan and its results. What is more, the paper seeks to introduce the new upcoming reforms in public administration because the country has encountered serious riots in January that consequently requires changes in the system of public administration. Thus, the aims of the complex reformation of public administration which the President of Kazakhstan Kassym Jomart Tokayev has set will be presented in this paper.*

*The approach that has been used in this paper was descriptive and relied on analysing the secondary data, including various journal articles, reports, and national and state programs.*

**Keywords:** public administration, digital technology, reform, PSC, e-Government, Republic of Kazakhstan

## Introduction

Public administration plays a significant role since its high and qualitative level ensures the country's development and strengthens its competitiveness in the world arena. Public administration, in its general understanding, represents activities of state bodies and their

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officials that have to put the plan into practice to benefit society. In this regard, states annually produce funding for this area and strive to implement effective reforms. The Republic of Kazakhstan is no exception.

The Republic of Kazakhstan has been improving the system of state and local administration for 30 years. The leadership of the country, considering the main principles of public administration, namely the legal, the political and the organisational one, always attempt to bring and insert the best practices into its own system. Namely, the state takes into account the values of the rule of law and the protection of citizens' rights in the framework of the legal approach. Under the political one, the main objective of public administration in Kazakhstan is to implement the people's will as best as possible. Within the last approach, the organisational one, the government attempts to efficiency and effectiveness of its regulation.

Thus, at the dawn of its independence, the Republic of Kazakhstan, from 1991 to 1994, established a legislative and regulatory framework. According to paragraph 2 of article 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan: "The fundamental principles of the activity of the Republic are public concord and political stability; economic development for the benefit of all the nation; Kazakhstani patriotism and resolution of the most critical issues of state affairs by democratic methods including voting by national referendum or in Parliament."<sup>2</sup> Thus, the Republic of Kazakhstan has enshrined norms in the Constitution to fulfil obligations by democratic means through state bodies.

Bespalov argues that the reformation of public administration in the Republic of Kazakhstan was necessitated due to global trends and the importance of implementation of state-building in those states after the disintegration of the USSR.<sup>3</sup>

The country has also adopted several state documents and strategies to reform public administration. For example, the first President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, in his address *Growing Welfare of Kazakh Citizens: Increase in Income and Quality of Life*, noted that a compact and efficient state machinery should play a huge role in the implementation of any reforms, which should consider all its actions through the prism of improving the welfare of the people.<sup>4</sup> Based on the above, the document was adopted and approved by the Presidential Decree of 26 February this year, aiming to improve the efficiency of the state apparatus. This document is the concept of the development of public administration in the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030 that will be considered below in the paper.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Constitution, Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, s. a.

<sup>3</sup> S. Bespalov, 'Reforming Civil Service in Kazakhstan', *Russian Journal of Education and Psychology* 11, no 55 (2015), 131–148.

<sup>4</sup> State of the Nation Address of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, 05 October 2018, Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> The concept of the development of public administration in the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030, 2021.

## The general characteristics of the Republic of Kazakhstan and its structure of public administration

The Republic of Kazakhstan is one of the largest countries in the Central Asian region that has borders with the Russian Federation, China, and the other Central Asian states such as the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

The Republic of Kazakhstan declared itself a democratic, legal, unitary state with a clear government structure after the collapse of the Soviet Union and gaining its independence. The Republic of Kazakhstan's form is reflected in the country's leading law, the Constitution. Under Article 3, "the state power in the Republic of Kazakhstan shall be unified and executed based on the Constitution and laws following the principle of its division into the legislative, executive and judicial branches, and a system of checks and balances, which governs their interaction".<sup>6</sup>

The Parliament represents legislative power in the Republic of two chambers: upper (Senate) and lower (Majilis). The executive branch includes the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The Supreme Court exercises judicial power in the country. Also, the Constitutional Council plays a unique role in the structure of state administration.<sup>7</sup>

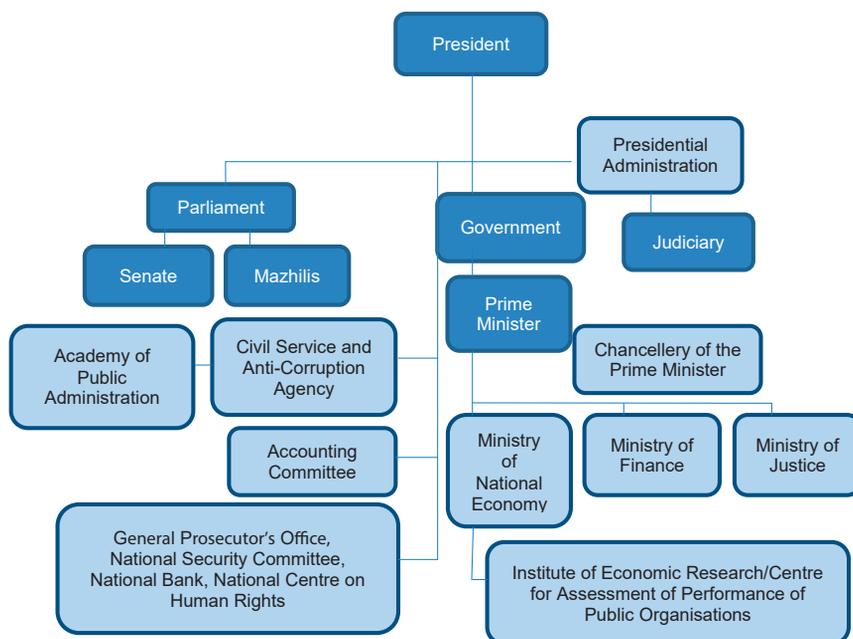


Figure 1: The centre of government in Kazakhstan

Source: OECD, 'Reforming Kazakhstan: Progress, Challenges and Opportunities', s. a.

<sup>6</sup> The Constitution, Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, s. a.

<sup>7</sup> The Republic of Kazakhstan, Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, s. a.

It is argued that governance in the Republic of Kazakhstan is characterised as hierarchical and highly centralised. Indeed, it is the Soviet legacy that has been left from the dissolution of the USSR. Thus, the article ‘Decentralization of power as a factor in increasing the efficiency of public administration in the Republic of Kazakhstan’ indicates that this is the result of the fact that Kazakhstan, like other post-Soviet states, inherited from the former Soviet Union a centralised system of government, economy and society.<sup>8</sup> The high centralisation of political processes in Kazakhstan is annually mentioned in the reports and ratings of international independent organisations and agencies. For example, one of those institutions is the organisation for economic cooperation and development (OECD). According to one of the organisation’s reports, it is claimed that certain state bodies, such as the Presidential Administration, the Prime Minister’s Office and the Ministry of National Economy, have more influence on decision-making despite extensive decentralisation reforms. Besides, the powers of the President are very extensive.<sup>9</sup>

The work “‘Mainstream’ of the past: How did the decentralization reform take place in Kazakhstan’ notes that the enormous territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan with a quite small population and the effective provision of public services necessitated the adoption of certain elements of the decentralisation type.<sup>10</sup> Some points of decentralisation of public administration will be presented in more detail in the next paragraph of this paper.

## **The process of the decentralisation of public administration in the Republic of Kazakhstan**

The importance of the decentralisation of public administration has been highlighted in two Presidential Addresses to the people of Kazakhstan: the Address of Kazakhstan–2030, *Prosperity, Security and Improving the Welfare of All Kazakhstanis*, and the Address of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Leader of the Nation Nursultan Nazarbayev to the people of the Kazakhstan 2050 Strategy, *A New Political Course of the Established State*.<sup>11</sup>

So in the Kazakhstan–2030 Address, *Prosperity, Security and Improving the Welfare of All Kazakhstanis*, the president highlighted long-term priorities, one of them being the reorganisation and improvement of the state apparatus. The President noted that the reform should be based on and consists of the following:

- a compact and professional government focused on only a few of the most critical functions
- strategy-driven programs of action
- established inter-agency coordination

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<sup>8</sup> S. Khalikova, ‘Decentralization of power as a factor of improving of public administration in the Republic of Kazakhstan’, *KazNU Bulletin. Philosophy series. Cultural science series. Political science series* (2013), 118–125.

<sup>9</sup> OECD, ‘Reforming Kazakhstan: Progress, Challenges and Opportunities’, s. a.

<sup>10</sup> A. Umarov, “‘Mainstream’ of the Past: How Did the Decentralization Reform Take Place in Kazakhstan?”, *CABAR*, 24 July 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Strategies and programs, Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, s. a.

- increased authority and responsibility of ministers, their accountability and strategic control over their activities
- decentralisation within ministries, from the centre to the regions and from the state to the private sector
- a resolute and relentless fight against corruption
- improvement of the system of recruitment, training and promotion of human resources<sup>12</sup>

The above points target different types of decentralisation, such as administrative and political. For instance, political decentralisation, which aims at giving more power to citizens and their elected representatives in decision-making and public administration. Also, administrative decentralisation aims at redistributing powers, responsibilities and financial resources to provide public services between different levels of government. Financial decentralisation, which means a series of policies aimed at increasing the financial autonomy of sub-national governments.<sup>13</sup>

The acute need for all types of decentralisation in the country was also noted in the Kazakhstan 2050 Strategy, *A New Political Course of the Established State*. The principal idea of decentralisation is to provide rights and important resources for making decisions from the centre to regional state bodies.<sup>14</sup> As it is indicated in the document, decentralisation is an effective change in the system of public administration.

The realisation of the aims mentioned above is conducted in the framework of the development of public administration in the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030, building a “people-centred” model – “People First”.

The concept of the development of public administration in the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030 includes forming a new “people-centred” model of public administration. According to the document, the new model of public administration should be based on five primary principles. Thus, these are “hearing”, effective, professional, pragmatic and accountable.

Following the first one, namely the “hearing” principle, the state politics must be obeyed to the crucial fact: “People First”. Therefore, people will be able to make their voices heard and choose the decisions that are important to them, which in turn will increase trust in the state and create a “people-centred” state. Under the second one, the critical factor of the development of any state and improvement of people’s quality of lives depends on the effectiveness of public administration. Thus, the principle is based on achieving the goals and objectives with the most efficient use of the state’s available resources. The principle of a pragmatic state is enclosed in the idea that all decisions of the state bodies must be taken considering the needs of future generations. Also, the formation and the realisation of state policy and reform must be planned for the long- term.

<sup>12</sup> S. Miroshnikova, *Decentralization of Public Administration in the Republic of Kazakhstan* (North Kazakhstan State University, 2012, 304–308).

<sup>13</sup> A. Ozmen, ‘Notes to the concept of decentralization’, *European Scientific Journal* 10, no 10 (2014), 415–424.

<sup>14</sup> Mark Otto, ‘Kazakhstan 2050 Strategy’, s. a.

Another significant characteristic of state has been indicated in the concept. It is the principle of the professional state. It is known that in order to transform public administration into a service-oriented model, competence and human resource capacity that meet high standards are required. Apart from it, state public bodies always have to find new innovative ways to resolve problems and use modern technologies while providing public services. From my point of view, the final principle that is significant in the concept of the development of public administration in the Republic of Kazakhstan is the principle of an accountable state. It includes the following: information openness, accessibility, public accountability. The importance of this relies on the following fact: nowadays, the whole world is switching its traditional way of providing public services to distance one. In other words, the digitalisation of public administration is widely seen since most countries in the world link their development to digitalisation. Therefore, modern information technology and new means of communication should be used in interaction with citizens in Kazakhstan as well.<sup>15</sup>

It is worth mentioning that the complete digitalisation is being considered a massive challenge for both government officials and the population of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The reason for that is being experiencing issues with computer literacy and so-called digital divide or absence of types of equipment (computers, laptops and smartphones) and adequate Internet connectivity.

## **The provision of public services through modern technologies in the Republic of Kazakhstan**

The effective change of public administration in many developed states happens with the use of modern technologies. The Republic of Kazakhstan also puts much effort in providing quality and fast public services using modern technologies. It is worth mentioning that after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the government of the Republic of Kazakhstan as well as other post-Soviet Union states, began the integration of mechanisms of interrelation between their citizens and public administration bodies through informational technologies. In other words, the e-government and various portals of delivering public services were presented. Thus, for instance, it is the Public Services Portal in the Russian Federation, the ASAN service centre in Azerbaijan, and the Population Service centre in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Mentioning the Republic of Kazakhstan, firstly, the idea of creating an e-Government was born. The formation and establishment of e-government is conditionally divided into four stages. The main aim of planning was to increase the quality and effectiveness of public administration and public services. The e-Government aims to automate the activities of state agencies, which could allow citizens to use highly demanded e-services more effectively.<sup>16</sup> As noted in the scientific and practical recommendation ‘Improvement of the

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<sup>15</sup> A. R. Utegenova, ‘Kazakhstan’s 2030 Development Strategy, Significance and Results’, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Y. Amanbek et al., ‘Adoption of e-Government in the Republic of Kazakhstan’, *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity* 6, no 3 (2020).

quality assessment system of public services based on Canada's practical experience', the citizens of Kazakhstan have the opportunity to receive 865 interactive and transactional services. In addition, citizens can perform other operations, such as paying state fees and duties, paying taxes, utilities and fines.<sup>17</sup>

Also, a particular body (PSC) began to function in the cities of Kazakhstan. The Population Service Centre (PSC) is a state body designed to provide various public services through a single-window system. This institution was created to implement the Head of State Address mentioned above, by the Government Decree of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 05 January 2007 "On the Establishment of State Institutions, the Population Service Centres of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan".<sup>18</sup>

Population service centres currently operate in all regions and major cities of Kazakhstan. There are 313 Population Service Centres in the Republic, which provide 332 public services.<sup>19</sup> This unique state agency currently provides services to several state agencies at once. They are illustrated in the diagram below:

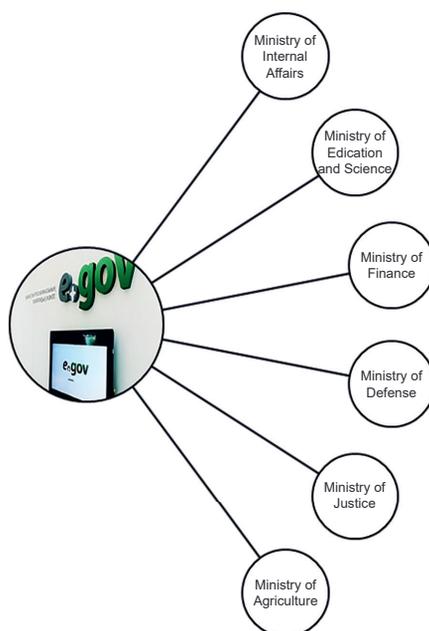


Figure 2: The public services of the Population Service Centre

Source: Compiled by the author.

<sup>17</sup> For scientific and practical recommendations on 'Improving the quality assessment system of public services based on the practical experience of Canada' see [www.vko.apa.kz](http://www.vko.apa.kz)

<sup>18</sup> On the Establishment of State Institutions, the Population Service Centres of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan, IPS "Әділет", 2007.

<sup>19</sup> NITEC, 'National Information Technologies', s. a.

According to Figure 2, the citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan can receive various public services of the following agencies: the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Committee or Land Administration of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Education and Science, as well as other ministries and agencies of the country through Population Service Centres.

As it was noted in Dzhanenova's analytical study, Population Service Centres on the principle of "single window": from "citizens for government to government for citizens" formation of population service centres (PSC) also occurred in four stages.<sup>20</sup> The first stage (pilot) was from 2005 to 2006. The second stage (resistance stage) took three years in total. From 2007 to 2010, the political, organisational, technological problems were solved. The third stage is characterised as innovative. At this stage from 2011 to 2015, there was integration with the system of "e-government", the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On public services" was adopted, the range of public services was expanded. Currently, public services are provided by personal contact through the offices of PSC and online through the portal of e-government. The main result of this was the reduction of customer service time, the introduction of a quality assessment system of the centre's staff, and the possibility of booking a visit to the centre through the portal of e-government. At the final stage (integration) from 2016 to 2020, the creation and development of "government for citizens" took place. Thus, the evolution of the development of a particular government agency dates back to 2005. As the author notes, PSCs are assigned the role of a "panacea" for an inefficient, sluggish and corrupt state apparatus.<sup>21</sup>

## Results of reform

Since the beginning of the reform of public administration, namely the creation of a special body PSC and the introduction of e-government, there has been a positive trend in meeting the requests of citizens to receive public services. It is primarily due to work done to integrate information systems and databases of state bodies and automate public services. Thus, according to the Ministry of Digital Development, Innovation and Aerospace Industry for 2019, about 82% of public services were automated under the state program Digital Kazakhstan.<sup>22</sup>

In my point of view, a tremendous amount of work has been and continues to be done in the country. One of the main priorities set for 2020 was the continuation of the automation of public services and the achievement of 90%. It is owing to the modern technologies used in providing public services, many advantages have been achieved in the country as a result of the reform of public administration and the transition to an electronic format for

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<sup>20</sup> S. Dzhanenova, 'Analytical study of One Stop Shop Service Centres: From Citizens for Government to Government for Citizens?', 2018.

<sup>21</sup> S. Dzhanenova and I. Esdauletov, 'Innovative reforms in public service delivery: What can Kazakhstan learn from the Canadian experience?', *International Journal of Civil Service Reform and Practice* 2, no 1 (2017), 1–8.

<sup>22</sup> Zerde, "'Digital Kazakhstan' state program', s. a.

the provision of public services. First of all, this is transparency, openness and reduction of corruption in obtaining certificates.

Despite the achievements mentioned above, the state public bodies were criticised by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kassym Jomart Tokayev at the plenary meeting at the lower house of the Parliament (Majilis) this year. Specifically, the President mentioned that “despite integrating key information systems, state bodies are still producing waste paper and meaningless correspondence”.<sup>23</sup> He called for complete digitalisation of public services and their practical function without paper-based confirmation. Apart from it, he has pointed out the other steps to reform the current system of public administration that will be shown in the next part of the paper.

## **New upcoming reforms in public administration**

The Republic of Kazakhstan has always been an example of political and economic stability in the Central Asian region. This paper has already mentioned that the country achieved various positive outcomes in its formation and reformation of the public administration field during the 30 years of independence. However, one unfortunate fact has to be taken into account. The serious unrest that occurred in the country at the beginning of January 2022.

The above-mentioned unprecedented event has necessitated rethinking of the model of relation of authority and the people. In other words, more new reforms in public administration were needed. The president has marked that the current public administration system needs complete reformation due to the following reasons: formalism, the high rate of corruption, the low level of human resource capacity and its high staff turnover.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, taking into consideration all the existed issues, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kassym Jomart Tokayev has proposed the following measures:

- Improvement of the system of selection for public administration service, namely remove barriers to entry.
- The principle of meritocracy should be the main principle used during the recruitment and promotion of public servants.
- The civil service should be open to any Kazakhstani citizen.
- The procedure of leaving the public service should also be simplified.
- An absolute and reasonable approach should be chosen while selecting a candidate for public service.
- A young, ambitious, and perspective generation of public servants is appreciated. There is a social lift for such people to formulate new thinking and introduce new approaches in the work of public administration apparatus within the Presidential Youth Talent Pool project. This practice will continue in the future as well.

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<sup>23</sup> Akorda, ‘Президент Касым-Жомарт Токаев принял участие в пленарном заседании Мажилиса Парламента’, 11 January 2022.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

- The size of the public administration apparatus should be fixed. It is important to note that 15% of the public servants have been cut in the previous year by the president's directive. The size of the state apparatus will gradually diminish.
- Heads of state bodies must interact with the citizens by conducting regular meetings in each city and village.
- The majority of meetings must be held online.

As it is seen from the proposals of the president, a complete reorganisation of public administration is expected in Kazakhstan.

## Conclusion

The article addressed the issue of public administration reform in the Republic of Kazakhstan. This topic nowadays is being very relevant for the country. As noted, the improvement of public administration begins with establishing appropriate regulatory and legal documents, national and state programs.

It should be marked that the Republic of Kazakhstan has achieved success in the establishment and reformation of its public administration. Many innovative ideas were implemented into the system during a short period of time. For instance, the country's leadership correctly noted the need to transform public administration using modern technology. As a result, the modernisation of public administration with the introduction of e-government was carried out. Apart from it, a specialised body such as the Population Service Centre was created to allow citizens to receive several types of public services at one place. Moreover, this unique centre grants equal access to all and excludes direct contact between document executors and citizens.

In my point of view, the innovations mentioned above have already had an enormous impact on the whole system of providing public services to the population of the country. Due to the limitations of this paper, the detailed outcomes may be the subject of further research. However, much work has to be done in the field of public administration in order to improve it. Therefore, this paper also enlists the specific tasks that have to be accomplished in the nearest future.

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